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ELSIE KITCHING

1870—1955

RECOLLECTIONS

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MISS KITCHING—1939

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RECOLLECTIONS

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ELISIE KITCHING

AUGUST 15TH, 1870—DECEMBER 28TH, 1955

The Times of December 30th headed the obituary notice of our dearly beloved friend 'Disciple of Charlotte Mason'. Could anything else have pleased her more for she lived to interpret her teacher and friend to each successive generation!

With marvellous instinct she recognised in the writings and speeches of contemporary educationalists, philosophers and scientists ideas that were in harmony with a continuation of Charlotte Mason's thought. She carried on a correspondence with such thinkers of the day, introduced Miss Mason's books to them and pointed out, in the pages of *The Parents' Review*, how alive and modern our founder still was.

The daughter of J. A. Kitching, she was born on August 15, 1870, and was educated largely at home. She took the intermediate examination in Arts at London University in 1893, but instead of proceeding to a degree she joined Miss Mason in the then young Parents' National Educational Union. As private secretary to Miss Mason and secretary to the House of Education and to the Parents' Union School, she played a part second only to Miss Mason in building up the P.N.E.U. movement.

When Miss Mason died in 1923, though the idea had by then caught on on a national scale, she had still the task of keeping it going. Her thirty years' service was rewarded in that year by her appointment as Director of the Parents' Union School, a post in which she succeeded Miss Mason and continued to hold until 1948. She remained editor of the *Parents' Review* until the next year, so that her period of service to P.N.E.U. extended to fifty-six years. After her retirement she for long nursed a project of writing a biography of Charlotte Mason, but nothing has yet been published.

Such is the brief outline of Elsie Kitching's life as printed in *The Times*. How much more could we, who knew and loved her, add! She succeeded Charlotte Mason as Director of the Parents' Union School and Editor of the *Parents' Review*: in the former capacity 'Kit-kit's' love and understanding of children and their needs, and her long apprenticeship as Charlotte Mason's secretary, made her wonderful letters to the members of the Parents' Union School stimulating and inspiring. Her help to members of the Parents' National Educational Union was further demonstrated in the *Parents' Review* which grew in stature under her as Editor.

Elsie Kitching's mental powers and width of reading were extraordinary; she loved good literature but had also a scientific mind and rejoiced in talks on the radio which let her into some of the secrets of modern discovery. Many early generations of College students will remember her talks on Art, which Miss Mason encouraged her to take after Mrs. Firth's death. Her great love of, and interest in, bird-lore made her bird walks an inspiration to all privileged to share them.

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Miss Mason appointed Miss Kitching a life-member of the Ambleside Council (now the Charlotte Mason Foundation) and she helped the Council by her wise advice in the guidance of the College and the Parents' Union School. She died happy in the knowledge that all was well with both these beloved institutions, and that they and the P.N.E.U. are bringing happiness and guidance to an ever-growing number of parents all over the world.

To her friends Elsie Kitching's going is a deep and abiding sorrow coupled with gratitude to Almighty God for all she was allowed to accomplish; and thankfulness that she passed on without suffering, and with unimpaired powers of mind. Hers was so humble and gentle a spirit that she never knew what she meant to us, but we know and bow our heads in silent respect, love and gratitude.

I have received a gracious message of sympathy from Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, coupled with deep appreciation of her work as Editor of the *Parents' Review*.

HENRIETTA FRANKLIN

Elsie Kitching was born at Stoke Newington in 1870 into a family which presently grew to consist of three boys and three girls. They led the quiet nursery life of those days, in a spacious house with a large garden. Mrs. Kitching was a stimulating presence in the household. She had wide interests and had great practical capacity, as well as an able mind for affairs and property. Early in her married life she became a keen student of educational matters, often speaking on the upbringing of children and being particularly interested in the mission field. Mr. Kitching was of a more passive nature, a busy man of business. He was gifted with an excellent physique which enabled him to ride a tricycle happily at the age of ninety-five.

Elsie Kitching as a child and all through her life preferred to keep in the background. She never willingly took a front place nor did she as a child go gladly to children's parties. There were yearly visits to the seaside but soon business difficulties brought financial troubles, many hardships with frequent changes of house. Elsie's school days were spent in High Schools of the rigid, old-fashioned kind. She always drew a veil over these years saying 'I never learned anything till I came to Ambleside'. Presently she and her elder sister Maggie went together to a boarding school in Byfleet with the view to working later for degrees. Elsie 'did not get on', but she remembered gratefully Dr. Bullinger and his Bible Studies and his ability to recognise each kind of tree at night by the sound of their branches. Elsie went to the Jersey Ladies' College at St. Heliers and she spoke with affection of Miss McCabe, but here again she 'did not get on' and only attained to the Intermediate Arts standard. There was something nervous in her make up which, through her growing years, seemed to cause strain. She also had two severe illnesses which held her back.

At home the Kitching family were all growing up. When they were together they spent happy hours singing. Elsie played the piano well and musically and loved to accompany the other members of the family. The brothers and sisters between them could supply every voice, Elsie contributing alto and Mr. Kitching bass when wanted. They sang much

religious music, but also comic songs and contemporary part songs such as *Oh who will o'er the downs so free?* and were in great demand locally outside the family. How happy Elsie must have been at the piano in the musical background! Theatre-going was never a possibility but an occasional concert was always a joy.

Another interest shared by the whole family, inspired by Mrs. Kitching, was the field of missionary endeavour. When Elsie's eldest brother was convalescing at home after a severe illness, Mrs. Kitching taught the boy herself and encouraged him to share and learn all domestic skills. 'When you grow up you will one day be a missionary bishop and then you will have to know how to do *everything*.' The boy became clever with his needle and in the kitchen and could mend anything in the house. Years later as a Bishop, it was to him that the native chiefs brought their watches to be mended.

Knowledge of the stars and interest in scientific matters were also shared by the family.

When Elsie left the Jersey Ladies' College she spent some months at home. It was a time of great financial difficulty and Mrs. Kitching was living at Bognor. Elsie was far from well and felt that life held no future for her. 'I don't know *what* to do for her,' thought her mother and the weary months went by. It was the year 1893. Winnie Kitching had just finished her training at Ambleside and was also at home. Charlotte Mason had work to do at the Bishop Otter College at Chichester and asked Mrs. Kitching whether she might be her guest and walk in daily to Chichester. This was happily arranged. Every evening on her return, Charlotte Mason was helped with her letter-writing by the two sisters, a happy time for all. The last day of the visit Mrs. Kitching took C. M. Mason into her confidence about Elsie's future. 'What *am* I to do with her?' 'Let me have her,' was the answer, 'let her come back to Ambleside with me.' And so it was that Elsie Kitching was given her work and the devoted friendship of a lifetime. She travelled to Ambleside with Miss Mason and there she spent her whole life.

The next years of Elsie's life are indistinguishable from those of Charlotte Mason, in work, in difficulties, in endeavour and in travel. In 1923 came the shattering loss of her friend and leader. Undaunted, Elsie carried on the work of the Parents' Union School as Director and continued to edit the *Parents' Review*. She who loved to be in the background had to come into the foreground. All through the Second World War she worked on; then in 1948 she gave over both Directorship and Editorship and settled down to write Charlotte Mason's Story. Low Nook, Ambleside became her home, in close touch with the work she so dearly loved.

Through all the busy years Elsie Kitching had no moment to read or to ponder C. M. Mason's writings. Now came the joy of their discovery. Perhaps of all she found in them, the aspect of thought expressed in 'Education is the Science of Relations' claimed her most intense sympathy and interest. She perceived that scientific thinkers of the present day were discovering the same truth from a another angle. *Wait Half a Century*, which she compiled in 1952, was the result of this perception. She did not step aside from her work on Charlotte Mason's Story in

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order to compile the booklet; to her it was a part of the story for (she thought) 'Charlotte Mason's story is one of thought rather than of incident.'

The very last work on the story was achieved last November. She was considering a chapter describing 'the liberal education for all' movement (the work of C. M. Mason in the national schools, 1913 onwards). E. Lyttleton speaking in 1922 had said that C. M. Mason had made 'the great educational discovery of the age'. 'I want to put that quotation somewhere in the chapter'—'Yes,' said her colleague, 'but what was the discovery he meant? I cannot find any direct statement.' That began a two-day search. No one loved a search as did Elsie Kitching, the room soon became a welter of old *Parents' Reviews* and papers. 'Ah!' she said at last, 'this is it,' and in triumph she pointed to a passage in *The Scope of Continuation Schools*, by C. M. Mason, which is given below:

'What we have perhaps failed to discover hitherto is the immense hunger for knowledge (curiosity) existing in everyone and the immeasurable power of attention with which everyone is endued; that everyone likes knowledge best in a literary form; that the knowledge should be exceedingly various concerning many things on which the mind of man reflects; but that knowledge is acquired only by what we may call 'the act of knowing' which is both encouraged and tested by narration, and which further requires the later test and record afforded by examinations.'

'The discovery,' said Elsie Kitching, 'is that *Persons* have *minds* and that minds need *relations* and that relations are inspired by the Holy Spirit, but we must find a better way to say it.' And there her search ended.

ESSEX CHOLMONDELEY

An old man's memory of Miss Kitching goes back over a longish stretch of years. Where and when it was that I first met her I cannot now recall. Probably it was at Ambleside, where I was staying with Miss Mason—an experience as valuable as it was happy—some few years before she died. The first impression made on me by Miss Kitching's personality then has never changed: it has repeatedly been confirmed. Many associations with her, whether at Scale How or Low Nook, or in London, Burgess Hill, or Overstone, or in others of the P.N.E.U. centres of activity in our own land, in addition to the frequent letters that came from her, have ever more deeply imprinted the original picture of her in my mind.

What were the indelible features of the portrait? First and last, was her spirituality. She was, in St. Paul's phrase, a woman whose 'conversation (which means her intimate home-life) was in heaven'. That is why, unrealised by herself, her very presence shed a calm inspiring breath of goodness upon those around her. Thence also sprang that astonishing devotion to labour in the service of others which was just the expression of her self.

Has anyone ever seen Miss Kitching fussed or bothered, or impatient of interruption by those who sought her counsel, no matter how busy she was? Moreover, she was so wise. That is what made her the ready helper of us all. Wisdom is a very different thing from cleverness. I do not think she was clever; and she, so humble-minded, would have been

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the last person to imagine it. But the range of her learning was immense. And her retentive memory preserved her knowledge immediately ready to command. Included in the store of her mind was an accurate knowledge of Miss Mason's many books. It was startling to many, perhaps indeed to most, of us to hear her in any discussion quote instantly, and often verbatim, what Miss Mason's view of the matter was. And such direct appeal to the canonical scriptures of P.N.E.U. of course settled the question. Whatever some of us may have previously thought, Miss Kitching generally proved right. Her speech, like her judgement, was always tempered by such a charming sense of humour that it carried conviction to even the most perverse or prejudiced objector.

These characteristics are observable in the vivid photograph of Miss Kitching which is here reproduced. There is one more facet of her mind which must not be omitted—her scrupulous conscientiousness both as a writer and a speaker whenever she felt that some adverse criticism needed to be made or praise to be accorded. Had she erred a hair's breadth from the perfect standard of truth and of justice? She would weigh and ponder, correct and re-correct, until she felt quite sure that not by a single syllable had she either belittled or magnified the reputation of anyone, or given a wrong turn to a sentence which she had written.

H. COSTLEY-WHITE

I have just heard that Miss Kitching has at last ended her long course. I think of you all in the loss of so fine and lovable a woman.

I worked with her closely from before the death of Charlotte Mason to whom she introduced me. I had many visits with her: at first at Ambleside and later for the after-session discussions in London.

In our work she passed on from Miss Mason a strong tradition of respect for an examiner—I must use that word little as I felt it fitted me in my apprenticeship to the P.U.S. She was patient in getting me to understand the important principles: and I was fortunate in finding them so close to my own ideas of education as a practising teacher, in school and out. And how wisely she wore the mantle of her dearly loved leader! We have made changes—such as that from marks to written notes, the most important of them all; but they have ever been in the line of healthy growth from the plant Miss Mason established.

Personally—well, one cannot tell all the little touches that build up a friendship: such as her outward care for my well-being at Scale How and in other rooms in Ambleside; and, more intimately, the rides and walks with her—always in the warm atmosphere of a shared enthusiasm. To the very end, preoccupied as she was with the biography of Charlotte Mason, her mind and talk was never far from the central theme of her life; and yet it was no more 'shop' than—what shall I say?—the companionship of some other pilgrim and his friends on their journey.

Dear friend she was: I have had none other with whom I have shared more eagerly our ideals for the life of the young ones we help to care for. It is the close of a great chapter—but the work goes on.

VYVYAN RICHARDS

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Memories of over forty years crowd in, and earliest memories of students days are strangely clear. A quiet figure always near Miss Mason, at hand if needed, walking behind her to the front door where Barrow and the open coach stood waiting, putting a copper hot-water bottle at her feet and tucking the rug round her; Miss Mason's gracious smile as the carriage bowled away down the drive was her signal to turn and go back to her work. E.K. sitting at her small table by the French windows of the drawing-room on a Sunday afternoon, gravely alert to write down every word as Miss Mason talked to us for maybe half-an-hour on a verse from the Gospels. Almost silent bird-walks on Borran and the thrill of being shown tufted-duck on the water in the wintry sunlight, by an expert who could tell you just what field-marks to watch for, and what call-notes heralded the returning migrants on the terrace at night. Then there was the gaiety of conversation sitting at E.K.'s table in the dining-room.

When she took Miss Mason's place (and how she hated one to say so!) for me there were years abroad with her staunch support and understanding as she shared our work with children and our adventures of nature study in far countries.

The years since the war have brought the privilege of 'open house to old friends' in the sunny upper room at Low Nook, so strangely like the morning-room at Scale How. In both, the remembered picture is of manifold activity, usually at high pressure, correcting proofs in long 'galleys' draped over a desk laden with papers and correspondence and photographs of P.U.S. children, and tiny dishes of treasures brought to her from moor and mountain, or a vase of yellow Welsh poppies which Mrs. Hindmoor (her good friend who comes daily from the village to help in Low Nook) would bring for her. 'Mrs. Hindmoor is wonderful! I could never get them to stay alive for Miss Mason—they would drop at once!' And of course there was food for the birds outside her window and, to her great joy this autumn, a ring of gorgeous red fly agaric toadstools round the little birch tree not far away from it.

'Bird' news was constantly exchanged and her expert knowledge of bird life in the neighbourhood was invaluable. Just before Christmas a friend who often telephones bird observations in the valley rang up on a bitter cold night to say that a nutcracker had just been beating against the lighted window; 'we have looked it all up and it couldn't be anything else'. I wrote at once to Miss Kitching, saying that the observer was 'quite safe'. Her reply on a post-card was typical: 'The only record in fifty years proved to be an immature starling!'—which roused an indignant reply from me. But she was right. I have just heard that the bird had come again later that night, had been caught and brought into the house, and *was* an immature starling! So another lesson in caution has been learnt, and I can almost hear dear Miss Kitching chuckling with glee!

How perennially young she was! Young in mind and heart and spirit and interests, always seeing fresh visions of the coming of the Kingdom, eager and enthusiastic as many a younger mind has long since ceased to be. Retirement? she never *could* retire! Sometimes

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one was greeted with: 'Go away! I'm much too busy to see you now', trying to race 'the little time I have left' to write Miss Mason's biography. Sometimes it was: 'Come here at once—you haven't been to see me for *months*! If you are *very* good, I'll show you something special in the post this morning.' And how she delighted in all I could tell about my work in a nearby hospital school; she knew those children as individuals and would ask after them as Miss Mason used to ask about children in our family posts long ago.

MARGERY GLADDING

SPEAKING PERSONALLY

Dear Miss Kitching: she has been one of the props of my life ever since I was handed over to her in 1909, very raw and very frightened, to be her first ever assistant in the innumerable tasks which fell to her as Charlotte Mason's secretary. She was a young woman then, quick as a flash of lightning in all she did, comprehending in her scope the most varied assortment of occupations from arranging the flowers to setting examination questions and reviewing books. She kept all the College and Practising School records and accounts, and attended to all the details of Miss Mason's personal comfort and well-being. From the first day of our association working for and with her was an education and inspiration, and yet the homeliest and most natural way of happy living. I left her in 1912, but never was dissociated with her in thought and spirit; it was impossible to be so for her imprint was so deep and indelible it would have lasted a lifetime.

When I rejoined her in 1927, Miss Mason had died and Miss Kitching was Director of the Parents' Union School; a much more powerful personality though still shrinking from the least spark of limelight and encased in an armour of humility. Once again I felt that power went forth from her, not only the power of a keen tenacious mind but powerful gentleness, wisdom and affection. One stood in the presence of greatness when with her: to live and work with it day by day was to be especially blessed. And such fun to be behind the scenes with greatness, and to know that the famous Director was a wonderful reviver of old hats, and loved putting new touches on clothes grown boring while still too new to throw out.

Others will testify to her deep religious feeling, to her wide learning which put so many of us to shame, to her sparkling and often mischievous gaiety. All of these she possessed in full measure to the very end of her selfless and dedicated life. None of us can sorrow over this end, painless and peaceful in her own beloved surroundings; but still with Christiana some of us must exclaim: 'I know not how to be willing you should leave us in our pilgrimage: you have been so faithful and loving to us, you have fought so stoutly for us, you have been so hearty in counselling of us, that I shall never forget your favour towards us.'

IRENE STEPHENS

I owe Miss Kitching such a lot, for she was always so sweet and generous to the young and foolish. I have written what follows because she asked me to write something on these lines the last time we talked together on December 19th, and because it seems to me that this quotation is particularly apt for her. I told her I did not think I could write adequately but that I knew what she meant even though I could not do justice to it. What is true about the familiarity of truth is, I think, also true of death.

No one ever went to visit Miss Kitching without bringing something away—often a book, a paper or a cutting suggested by her reading, writing or listening-in—sometimes a recommendation to do one of these things oneself—and always the unconscious gifts of hope, courage, joy. We all know her lovely sense of humour as well as her great interest in modern science and her delight in the closing gap between science and the humanities, and her awareness of the need for patience in the progress of ideas, many of which she saw coming to fruition at last. With her love of ideas and of people, she seemed perpetually young, and if, as has been said, when one has lost the sense of wonder and of hero-worship one is old, then Miss Kitching remained young to the end. Yet I think her wisdom was the gift by which she most enriched us—that, and her faith in a great vision.

In this last talk I had with her just before Christmas, she quoted to me Benjamin Whichcote's words printed at the top of 'A Short Synopsis of the Educational Philosophy advanced by the Founder of the P.N.E.U.': *No sooner doth the truth . . . come into the soul's sight, but the soul knows her to be her first and old acquaintance.* We were talking of the wholeness of truth, and of Miss Mason's insight which enabled her to see education not merely as a method or a collection of principles, but as something much wider and more splendid—a 'learning to live', a learning to see, however imperfectly, the reality or inward vision we call truth, which transcends outward sense and travels beyond reason.

'You know what the quotation means,' she said. 'Write it down for me.' The quotation, found so unerringly, and going to the root of things in the way Miss Kitching's quotations always did, summed up for me what I had a few days before haltingly tried to express. How does one know when one is on the right path? How can one tell whether one's view is straight? Perhaps this is what the Three Kings from the East wondered when they followed the Star to Bethlehem and found themselves unexpectedly in a most unroyal place. But when they had arrived they had no doubt. They recognised the truth when they found it.

When we meet the truth, we notice, I think, three things. First, that like a jigsaw, the pieces fit into place unexpectedly. Lesser truths dawn, and are seen to be connected; it all ties up.

Then, we shrink in size as we see ourselves and our problems from a different and strange angle, and like those algebraical numbers with recurring indices, more and more dawn upon us. This might be a depressing process but it is not so because truth is always bigger than man and independent of self.

Yet—and this is what strikes me most—though alien in this sense, strange and surprising, truth is always a friend; the stranger is recog-

nised, the surprise is joyful. An old acquaintance! Or as Wordsworth put it:

*Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home.*

Miss Kitching has returned home, and we who love her are glad for her sake and deeply thankful for the help and guidance she has given us in following the star which shines for all men.

HELEN LIVINGSTONE

My earliest remembrance of Miss Kitching is in my first year at Scale How in 1902. She used to take us Juniors for lovely and exciting bird-walks; 'exciting' because she had such knowledge of birds and their ways that she never drew a blank—there were always birds to see and watch and listen to; 'lovely' because we learnt a little to know her too. I remember a special walk up Stock Ghyll when she taught me to recognise a chaffinch's song, me so stupid and slow and she so patient and merry over it. We all wanted to learn to recognise birds by their songs and would bombard her, at supper perhaps, with such questions as 'What was the bird that was singing at five past four, Miss Kitching?' Marvellously, she always knew, however busy she was.

Younger students will not connect her with birds, or picture her as a young woman, but we even affectionately nick-named her 'Blue Tit', perhaps because she often wore blue and was quick in her movements. In my early teaching years I spent almost all my free time 'birding' and Miss Kitching very often helped me to name discoveries, always as keenly interested in them as I was.

But it was not until I went to Overstone that I learnt to know her in deep friendship. I realised that as Director of the P.U.S. she was my Chief and I was working under her. All my difficulties went to her and I can never be grateful enough for her loving and tireless help. Several times I went up to Ambleside to spend a day or two 'at her feet'. It was a wonderful experience to work so closely with her, learning something of the depth and breadth of her knowledge and sometimes too—if I may so express it—being almost shocked at her humility. Overstone owes more than anyone will ever know to her loving guidance of its first raw H.M.

Later still, I had the chance of helping her with the reprinting of two of Miss Mason's books—correcting proofs and making careful changes. This led to much correspondence—long delightful letters from her in her very attractive, almost undecipherable writing. She would often enclose extracts from this or that book she was reading—and how widely she did read! Sometimes the book itself would arrive with

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paragraphs of special interest marked for me; once or twice my name was on the fly-leaf. So my knowledge, love and admiration of her grew; that she could ever find me of use was an honour I felt deeply, and many, many times her warm generous thanks for some trivial suggestion has left me shamed.

I cannot yet quite believe I have had her last letter—that never again shall we have her loving welcome in Low Nook. But I like to remember that her last note written some few days before she died was on work accomplished—“Hurrah, the final proofs have gone to the printers!”

HELEN WIX

Nearly thirty years ago, as a P.U.S. child attracted by the signature at the bottom of my exam. report, I was told that it was Miss Kitching ‘who knows all about every single child in the P.U.S.’ Since then, as a student at Scale How, and particularly since my marriage, I have come to appreciate fully her wonderful capacity for knowing and caring about all the ‘persons’ she met.

She took a great interest in my family as it grew, and I soon discovered that she loved hearing the sort of stories which delight fond parents and tend to bore everyone else. So I gradually found myself storing up things to write and tell her. She nearly always answered by return, often in her own handwriting, her letters bubbling with pleasure, just as I could imagine her eyes twinkling over some little thing I told her, especially if it illustrated a point in Miss Mason’s teaching. Sometimes she would send a pamphlet or cutting in connection with a remark I had made.

Twice I was able to take some of the children to see her. Each time she was ready for us; there was a bird book for the nature lover, an amusing trinket for the restless one, even our family portrait Christmas card brought out after some months to discuss with us. I remember that she amused me with stories of my own children that I had forgotten. I don’t believe she ever forgot. Last time we saw her was at the 1954 Conference. She had written to say that she would like to meet my husband. So we put our name in the book and went with our three and two year olds at the appointed time. I had to go up first and there she was, the same as ever, waiting for me in the passage. When I returned with the children, I was asked to get the bird book admired last time (and remembered even now) and some photographs of P.U.S. pupils overseas. So that she could get to know my husband, she then sent the children to the P.U.S. room downstairs.

Now my husband has strong opinions that the different faculties in the University should mix at both staff and student level, and he tries to carry this out in his musical activities throughout the University. As a Dean and member of the Senatus he knows his colleagues pretty well, but it soon became evident that Miss Kitching, from the seclusion of Low Nook and in the midst of all her other interests, knew as much, and more, about many of their recent activities as he did. They talked of many topics of mutual interest. That my husband had known Professor de Burgh pleased her much. Her lunch arrived and I suggested that we went, but the suggestion was waved aside. Eventually, con-

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scious that many people would want to see her, I managed to bring their conversation to an end. My husband was delighted at her agility of mind and practical and up-to-date attitude. It is hard to believe that she was then eighty-three.

After this visit her letters contained affectionate references to my husband, and I in turn sent her news of his doings and she was able to hear him broadcast once or twice. It was lovely to know that she was there taking such an interest in us all, and yet it was an interest in just a single child in the P.U.S. To how many others also must she have extended her care and affection!

Only yesterday the thought crossed my mind, ‘I must write and tell Miss Kitching’, for I had not heard the news of her death. Yet even in our sadness at her departure the very thought of her causes us to smile with pleasure at the joy we had in her. It is as if, like one of her beloved migrants, she has flown to another country where there will assuredly be plenty of room for her delight in the small as well as in the profound things of life.

BETTY NEWMAN

Everyone loved Miss Kitching because she was a friend to all. There must be hundreds who could write of her fun and humour, her wise counsel or her overflowing enthusiasm. What was specially found by those who worked with her?

Yes—‘with her’ is the right way to express the relationship. For she had supremely the art of letting one feel that she valued the opinions and advice of all, though at the same time her mind re-considered everything, so that ideas were used in her own way.

The members of the Staff of the Parents’ Union School—to which I belonged from 1938 to 1947—were free to carry on the work, each in her own way, though plans had always to be dependent on the needs of the day’s posts or on any new plan from Miss Kitching. Yet for all our freedom, she had an uncanny knack of knowing immediately if anything unusual was going on in the P.U.S. room and she would slip in for some reason. Or some days she would be constantly in and out because her mind was working so busily on something in which each of us had to share in turn: we might be called into her room any number of times and would need to be alert to keep abreast of the speed with which her mind was moving. One piece of our work however was treated as sacred, that of checking addresses and counting fillings for the envelopes taking out programmes and examinations term by term. Once we had reached that stage, Miss Kitching’s head had only to come round the door to retire with the swiftness and modesty of the child who sees at once he has come into the wrong place; her work would wait on ours on those days.

* * * * *

What an anxious term we had that autumn towards the middle of the war when Miss Kitching was so ill! To see that she had all she needed, while knowing that her aim was to want nothing lest there should be extra work for others, was no easy task. It never struck her that people loved to do things for her. She knew that at that time

others were unwell too, and she so disliked to add to the labours of anyone.

One of Miss Kitching's most inspiring qualities was that she just did not recognise the meaning of defeat. In those war years there were frustrations enough in the book trade alone, but she was always prepared to start on a fresh line of planning if one proved fruitless. I have known no one else so able in bringing victory out of apparent defeat. Quietly conceding, retiring when she could not gain her point, a few weeks or months later, unobserved, E.K. had returned to the ground from which she had been driven, and was probably advancing on her own, in the way she thought best.

For all her gentle gaiety she must, of course, have known depression. What did she do when things went badly or she could not see her way? She washed her white kid gloves ready for church on Sunday, or—when things were at their worst—she darned her woollen underwear in the seclusion of her tiny bedroom! She once told me that it was a very soothing occupation for frayed nerves. How right she was, as always. . . . I think of that sometimes in the second half of our century, in a world of plastic and nylon in which darning is likely to become a lost art; how and when are we going to gather that serenity which played so large a part in Miss Kitching's life? With her Christian faith it brought her the wisdom, happiness and enthusiasms we all delighted to share. She used the little things of life—all the joys or troubles that came her way—and built them into the one grand theme with which she upheld Miss Mason's work that was her own life and being.

EILEEN C. PLUMPTRE

Miss Kitching—she is part of my earliest memories of childhood holidays in Ambleside, when visits to Scale How were among the highlights to be treasured in memory until 'next time'.

My mother was Lydia James (*née* Hall), and as friend and disciple of Miss Mason was always welcome at the 'House of Education', and I followed eagerly in her wake and absorbed the liberal outlook and happy, loving atmosphere whose centre and heart was Elsie Kitching.

Later, during the war years of 1939–1945, I came to know her intimately in my own right, when we were living in a cottage at Waterhead and meeting her regularly several times a week.

Her eager interest in the small, personal concerns of her friends and the hundreds of past and present children of the Parents' Union School, as well as in the wider field of international affairs, always astonished me, and I think that it was this loving preoccupation with others—always outward turning, never thinking of self—which kept her so amazingly young at heart.

What will leap to my mind when Elsie's name is mentioned, as it will be as long as her friends meet each other? Gentleness, love and a high idealism, so that one was ashamed to fall below her standards, although she would never reproach one.

URSULA BARTER

I had a warm regard and affection for Miss Kitching, a very distinguished old lady. She died full of years and honour. It was a privilege to know her. For me her friendship, for that is what it was, was something I shall always value. She was an immense tonic and stimulant. Perhaps it was easier for me, as an outsider, to talk to her than it was for many inside the P.N.E.U. and P.U.S. I am sure she was looked upon with tremendous awe and respect owing to her close ties with the Founder. I used to argue fiercely and she would love it and bait me further! And then we would burst into laughter, thoroughly enjoying every moment. The parting was always the same. How good it was of me to give her so much of my time—a humbling remark which made me realise something of the greatness of the woman who had allowed me to talk with her with such obvious pleasure for perhaps an hour or more, but what an hour! The goodness was all hers for giving me a little glimpse of her intellect and greatness. It was she who taught me something of the spirituality of science. How she loved to argue.

And then one can remember her beauty and devoutness in worship on the rare occasions when latterly she could strengthen herself to make the real physical effort to go to St. Mary's. I constantly offered that the Church should come to her in her room, but the answer was always the same, that while she could walk on her feet she would go herself, and that the clergy had far too much to do than to wait on the whims of an old woman. As if anyone could call Miss Kitching capricious or old! Every time I went I used to ask after the progress of the 'biography' and bully her to get on with it. I do not know how much she ever wrote of it, but there must be a mass of material for someone to wade through. I express the hope that when this book materialises it will also include much about Elsie Kitching, for the movement owes immensely to her.

VERNON D. CLARKE

Amid so many memories that come to mind when thinking of Miss Kitching, with whom I was privileged to work in happy co-operation for many years, that which is outstanding is her utter and selfless devotion to the cause she had at heart. This cause was rooted in a disciple's love and admiration for the founder, Charlotte Mason.

For this reason, but with the humility that was so characteristic of her, Miss Kitching was always anxious to help the young and very ignorant Principal who arrived at the College in 1938. At least once a week there would be some problem in connection with the students' Education lectures based on Miss Mason's books. This was hardly mentioned in the morning-room (later the students' Reading Room) before Miss Kitching proceeded to busy herself on the subject and would soon afterwards appear in the drawing-room laden with books of reference that had bearing on it. Most grateful for her help, I would endeavour to master the contents of the six or seven volumes deposited (with references found) on my table, only to be embarrassed by the arrival of three or four more at fifteen minute intervals, because Miss Kitching had remembered some further point! So generous was she with her time and so kindly in her anxiety to help a younger generation to understand Charlotte Mason's thought that she never spared herself.

Perhaps my very happiest memories of Miss Kitching centre round those occasions when she showed me the truth of Charlotte Mason's philosophy, tracing the growth of her educational thought from one book to another. At times I would try to find out if the disciple's own ideas varied at all from those of the founder but I never discovered the slightest divergence. In fact I doubt if she were happy until she could find a passage from Charlotte Mason's writings which could illustrate her answer on some point raised by a modern author. I have never known her defeated in her search! Our discussions very often rambled away from education to religion, history, literature, politics, for I found myself very close to Miss Kitching in thought and appreciation of these and loved to listen to her talk, never ceasing to marvel at the resources of her well-stored mind and her accumulated wisdom and judgment. She was devout with no trace of sentimentality.

Miss Kitching and I always had tea together at 4 p.m. She would arrive punctually in the drawing-room and go off to her work the moment the bell rang at 4.25. Often she would bring with her a letter from a P.U.S. mother, an examination answer by a P.U.S. child, or a book sent for review, and not infrequently, I was able to pass on something learnt from these to the students in their Education lectures. Sometimes Miss Kitching would talk of the past—of Miss Mason and holidays in Germany. I missed these social half hours very much when, in 1946, Miss Kitching moved out of Scale How into Low Nook. For a time after the move I tried to report little anecdotes to her as of yore and when, as was inevitable, she no longer knew all the students and staff, she still loved to hear of some episode in the Practising School which illustrated the truth of Charlotte Mason's philosophy.

I could write of Miss Kitching in the war years when she was always well up in the news and a staunch supporter of Winston Churchill, and when she would knit and read simultaneously in a most skilful manner. I could write of her enjoyment of parties, conferences, old students' visits, of children and much besides, but space cannot allow for more than these brief and most inadequate notes concerning one who provided a link between the nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, conveying all that was truly great in a former generation and defying the years with the amazing vitality of her mind.

All who loved Miss Kitching must rejoice that her great wish was granted in that she was enabled to work on to the end writing the story of Charlotte Mason and then slipping quietly across to the Eternal Shore.

JOYCE VAN STRAUBENZEE

I always knew Miss Kitching had an exceptional interest in and love of children, but it was not until my husband and I took our small son (when he was four) to see her at Low Nook that I realised how very deep and real was her understanding.

He viewed the visit with apprehension as he does not talk readily to grown-ups, especially when he meets them out of his own home, but he chatted away, almost at once, to her about a book on Australia which happened to be by her. She opened it and soon they were both pouring over the pictures and comparing impressions. She obviously won his

heart because, quite of his own accord, he used to write letters to her—he started by drawings which she seemed to understand! I once overheard him saying to another small boy something about 'my friend at Ambleside, Miss Kitching'. To him she was not just 'one of those people Mummy and Daddy go to see at Ambleside', but 'my friend'.

LYDIA HERING

Of the huge debt of gratitude I owe to Miss Kitching the first thing that comes to my mind is a personal one. She was young when I went to Ambleside as a student and she sat at the end of one of the tables in the dining room. There was great competition among many of us to sit by her and the conversation always turned upon birds, on which subject we found she was an inspiring authority. She made us—some of us, like myself, unable to distinguish a cock from a hen sparrow—keen to know and watch them, and when she took us for bird walks, four at a time, she sped along, stopping now and then to point out a field of yellow wagtails, the antics of a dipper, the nest of a grey wagtail or to listen to the enchanting call of a passing curlew. For the first time in my life I became really bird conscious and it has since been one of the joys of my busy life to know and recognise them by flight and song.

I was privileged to spend two short holidays with her, one in Drigg when her sister accompanied us, when we saw the sandwich terns who nested among the black-headed gulls and were surrounded by the raucous cries of hundreds of these birds. Here also we saw many sea birds and found the unusual site of an oyster catcher's nest on top of a low wall.

The most memorable holiday, however, was in Holy Island in 1937 when we crossed in a high cart with enormous wheels at low tide as sunset was gilding the sky. This was a time full of excitement. E.K.'s quick eye could pick out at an incredible distance one bird from many others, a bar-tailed godwit, grey plover, merganser, etc., but I remember, that she was disappointed in her quest for a blackeared wheatear!

A visit to the Farne Islands was a great thrill. It was not the nesting season, but the Pinnacles and Migstone were crowded with guillemots, razorbills, cormorants, etc., and on landing at Longstone Lighthouse we were enthralled to watch gannet diving and seals playing.

Another time we crossed at low tide on foot to St. Cuthbert's Island where a cross had recently been erected to mark the spot where the saint was wont to meditate. From the shore we watched turnstones nosing among the pebbles and the eider duck sailing in the shallow water quite unperturbed by our presence.

My sisters and I will never forget this holiday and E.K.'s enthusiasm about the history of this unique island which was unfolded to us by the Rev. Elford at the church.

I remember that at one of the Conferences E.K. read a paper describing her experiences at Borrans as she watched the migration of swallows. I wish this could be reprinted.

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My sisters and I feel that Burgess Hill School, in which E.K. was interested from its inception in 1906 to its Jubilee in 1956, owes much to her help and encouragement under three headmistresses.

BEATRICE M. GOODE

The last time I saw her was just a moment in the hall at Low Nook—a moment so typical of many visits, full of the joys of the early pussy willows she always loved, of Miss Goode's letter about the bee-eaters, of the historic background of the 'Unicorn Tapestries' I had seen in a New York Museum. (That was always the way her wide knowledge enriched and flowed around the fragmentary impressions one shared with her!)

It was always a joy to go to see her, she was so alight with vivid interest in the world, "so full of a number of things", and visits invariably became longer than one intended. There was so much to share—a new book, a freshly discovered significance in an old one, a child's paper in the P.U.S. If one had family news her interest was warm and alert. I have a precious memory of her deep and understanding sympathy when one day I told her how a prolonged anxiety—a perplexity of years—had faded into the joy that "cometh in the morning". Her eager and generous appreciation of any drawings I took to show her was always heartening. (A joke between us was the coolness of her interest in any pictures outside the Lake District. She thought I did not know and love any other countryside well enough to draw it—and she was quite right!)

There was a day, a few years ago, when (unbelievably) she suffered herself to be carried off home with me along by Rydal Water; I had lured her with the hope of the goosander. He failed us; but there was so much else which, she said, she had not seen for years, and her happiness bubbled like a child's.

I remember her first when I was ten years old, in the Practising School. Her devotion, her self-effacing vigilance guarded Miss Mason literally day and night, year in, year out, even as through these later years she has lived with the one purpose of guarding and promoting Miss Mason's work. The faithfulness and devotion are the very core of her—but to think of her in the days when (October 1914) my Father gave his portrait of her "to our dear Dragon" is like remembering a sapling when one has long known and loved a beautiful spreading tree . . .

MARY YATES

There was little that escaped the vigilance of Miss Elsie Kitching—many years ago I happened to give, on the Ceylon Wireless, a short talk to parents: when I came home in 1943 it was to find that Miss Kitching knew all about it—she was very thrilled too, to hear all the story of the translations of Miss Mason's *Home Education* into Bengali and Assamese. In her I found not only a great friend but a very wise counsellor: to be with her was such joy, for her mind was ever reaching out to wide horizons.

AMY H. REID

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On looking back, Elsie Kitching appeared to be the busiest person I have ever known; but even in her 'busyness' there was a selfless, devoted quality—a kind of enjoyment. I think her most busy times must have been when the new programmes, built up and conned over, were in the hands of the printers and there was much trotting to and from the press 'down the lane'—and the time when the examination papers came to Scale How to be perused and signed by Charlotte Mason. All the time came daily letters from parents wishing to enrol children, enclosing entrance forms with the traced outlines of fat little hands, or too long and bony ones. I think she must have known every member of the P.U.S., and I knew that I had only to look up from the letters I was struggling to decipher to ask for help to be given a wealth of detail about the writers who might have been her most intimate friends. What a mass of work Elsie Kitching had in her hands! For at that time C.M. was writing *The Saviour of the World* and constant articles to the papers. Miss Williams was there, of course, guiding the stream of College life, but Miss Kitching was in and out to Charlotte Mason all day long, and writing, writing herself, taking time off to take students for 'Bird Walks', but seeking little other relaxation as we would call it. Even after bed-time I often knew her to be putting the finishing touches to the P.R. or a programme, though with a guilty air, but not too tired to look up—greet me with her perennial quip, 'Now who is *this* looking at me over the door'! Busy! But I never saw E.K. 'put out' or irritable or 'too busy' to help anyone. Too busy to *speak* for hours on end—but her mind must yet have grasped the need that some obscure student might have for the right idea, the right book. She would come along, as she did to me, arms full of books, mind full of suggestions. An omnivorous reader, she joyfully pursued whatever interested her most at the moment through books and newspapers; relevant matter was cut out from daily newspapers and sent to its right destination, jokes handed round or pinned to a letter.

Her mind must have been tidily pigeonholed for she so easily produced the right quotation, the excerpt from a letter, the joke from *Punch*. I expect it was, for her daily work was so tidy. There were sets of little baskets fitted on top of one another—for paper, envelopes, urgent letters, newspaper cuttings, etc. These might, one would think, be left with impunity on a secretary's table—but no, they all lived in their proper places in a cupboard and there they were stored each evening until next day. I never saw a thing out of place in those busy days nor heard a reproachful or resentful word when underlings made mistakes. Always that ready laughter, and her own willingness to make amends to the offending person. And later on as one came back to college and the cares of term fell behind, what a joy it was to discuss with her the details of one's work or show her photographs. Again and again her wonderful memory surprised and pleased. How *did* she remember so much of one's work and children as well as one's personal family life? She enjoyed our holidays, too, and loved to know about the birds and flowers and books of leisure days. What fun we had one year on holiday together in the salt marshes on the Norfolk coast. Spoon-bills—waders—horned poppies—and arguments as to what the black and white bird that *wasn't* an avocet could be!

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She was so full of life and interest, so eager, and so deeply humble. It was always she who was reaping the harvest of someone else's mind—never aware that it was her lovely quality of mind that called out the expression of Art or religion or nature in her companion.

... Meeting cross accidents with high-hearted happiness'. If one window closed was there not another to open? She had indeed the single eye fixed on all she loved and found in the work of Charlotte Mason. And would they not *both* have said, 'I too, am under authority', leading as both did such utterly dedicated lives.

VIOLET CURRY

The President of an Association is often a mere figurehead—simply a name. Miss Kitching was not that kind of President; she was a real part of the Charlotte Mason College Association to which she gave that whole interest and lively contact that was so much a part of herself, and which coloured her approach to everything she undertook.

I well remember, when she was invited to be our President, with what delighted surprise she received the invitation; and that she wrote how honoured she felt to be chosen—though it was, of course, she who honoured us—but many have written of her true humility and it was in ways like this that she showed it.

It was during the years when I was Chairman of the Association that I realised how fully Miss Kitching played her part as President. I formed the habit of writing her a full account of all our meetings, and she in her turn would write a letter of greeting to all who were present at the gatherings. Her interest in and her knowledge of individual old students was a constant source of wonder to me, and to her a continual delight. She often told me of students who had lost touch with the Association, or who were sad or lonely through some personal tragedy. Through her they were made to feel one again with the great body of students trained at Ambleside, all of whom remembered Miss Kitching and felt her influence reaching out to them through their whole lives.

When she resigned as Director of the P.U.S., and we collected money for a presentation to her, again it was typical of her that she could only be persuaded to accept a small personal gift; the remainder of the money was paid into the fund for republishing Charlotte Mason's books. Mrs. Nuttall and I received hundreds of letters of appreciation, and in all of them one feeling was predominant—a feeling of thankfulness 'for her and for all that she stands for' as one writer put it.

I am glad to think that she used our gift to her, a comfortable chair, to the end of her days. I saw her sitting in it several times when I visited her at Low Nook. What warmth there was always in her greeting to each one of us, what interest in our individual concerns, what intimate knowledge of our work or our families! Surely no one inspired, through her own example, a greater warmth of affection and admiration than Elsie Kitching, President of our Association for so many years.

MARGARET MORRIS

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I have known Miss Kitching for the past thirty-one years and during those years my admiration for her grew each time I met and talked with her. Never did I see her otherwise than pleasant, with a happy smile always for everybody. I had many conversations with her. I was always reminded about the arrival of the flycatchers and asked to prepare the nesting-boxes for them.

One of her greatest pleasures was being in attendance at the Ambleside Rushbearing. Only last July did she watch the children as they passed along Rydal Road and up Smithy Brow, remarking as they went by on how beautifully they were carrying their Rushbearings. Miss Kitching was a person readily interested in the welfare of the young people and particularly those whose parents she knew. She was keen to know what progress they were making in their respective careers. On one occasion I had the pleasure of her company in my home over the Christmas holidays and during that time found her to be a most charming and considerate guest.

A short time ago, prior to her sad departure. I was frequently in contact with her and I especially remember her expressing delight at being able to see Stock Beck again after I had pruned back the trees which had been obstructing her view. Another kind thought, on her part, was to give me an annual reminder about making holly wreaths for the graves of Miss Mason and Miss Parish.

Miss Kitching left us as she had lived—peacefully and quietly—and will always be remembered in this way.

EDWARD FLITTERS

I came to work at Low Nook two years ago and I have never found anyone who appreciated as much as Miss Kitching did anything we did for her. She had a lovely nature and I shall miss her smile which greeted me every morning. She had a very happy disposition and did enjoy a joke; we had many a good laugh.

Miss Kitching loved her home and its beautiful surroundings and during this Christmastide she remarked to me several times, "I am so very happy to be at home and amongst such good friends who look after me". She used to get up at nine and was always ready for work by half-past ten. I shall miss seeing her sitting at her desk in her lovely big room. She liked to look out of the window and watch the Beehive children running up the drive on their way to school and she often said to me, "There are the students of the future, Mrs. Hindmoor". All through the summer and autumn she has been sorting and tidying everything. The last time I saw her, on the day before she died, she was resting on the sofa when I went to say 'goodnight' to her: she asked me to move some papers from one drawer into another saying "I want to leave my house in order, and I have finished it all now". We laughed about it together, but I shall always remember the last thing she said to me and how happy she looked.

JANET HINDMOOR

E.K. 1948—1955

When Miss Kitching retired from her work as Director of the P.U.S. and Editor of the *Parents' Review* it was in order to devote all her time and strength to her special task of telling the *Story* of Charlotte Mason. This was henceforth the main purpose of her life, and she set to work with loving care to prepare for the press a mass of material gathered from research into all the relevant sources. But more and more she came to feel that the actual events of Charlotte Mason's life were of secondary importance; 'it is Miss Mason's thought that matters', she would say, and so she steeped herself afresh in Charlotte Mason's writings and traced the development of her teaching. From time to time Miss Kitching would sum up the results of these 'adventures' in a short paper which she would circulate among her friends, and she was greatly cheered by the response aroused. She would seize eagerly upon any indication of a *meeting* between the ideas of Charlotte Mason and those of the intellectual and spiritual leaders of to-day, and would say joyfully, 'At last, after fifty years and more, Miss Mason's thought is coming into its own'.

Such a task could not be hurried, and was, from time to time, laid aside in order to carry out the revision and reprinting of Charlotte Mason's own books, so necessary for the growth of the P.N.E.U. movement as a whole. But all the time, in that pleasant quiet room at Low Nook, with its open windows and its laden bookshelves, the *Story* was taking shape, and Miss Kitching's normal daily routine included a morning of concentrated work with her secretary. The rest of the day would be given to preparation for the next day's work, varied by reading or talk with her friends or listening to the wireless, by which she kept in close touch with contemporary developments in thought and action.

Her interests included a wealth of subjects, and hardly a day passed without some discovery of a new and living idea which she hastened to share with others; the book one was urged to read forthwith might be a treatise on religion or philosophy such as those by Archbishop William Temple, Sir Charles Sherrington, Bishop Stephen Neill, Dr. John Baillie or Professor De Burgh; it might equally well be *The Little World of Don Camillo*, or *Do Babies Have Worries?* or *The Legend of the Unicorn* illustrated by mediaeval French tapestries. She was particularly fascinated by scientific progress, and human relationships concerned her greatly; she welcomed the growing recognition of the importance of the family as 'the unit of the nation'.

Her personal friendship was extended to all sorts and conditions of men, women and children. Though after her retirement she felt that the demands of her work prevented her from meeting more than a very few newcomers, she welcomed old friends, especially Charlotte Mason Teachers and their children. Young people always found themselves at home with her, and she got quickly into touch with the Fairfield girls who slept at Low Nook at one time. Students in the house soon took her into their lives; for instance, Miss Simon (of the P.U.S. Staff) recalls the last night of this autumn term, when 'about thirty students,

made up of the present ones at Low Nook, those who had lived here the previous year, and a few of their friends, sang impromptu carols in Miss Kitching's room. She loved every moment of it, and before they went she was passing round one or two rather unusual Christmas cards, in which S. Joseph, not the Virgin, was shown holding the Holy Child. This was a very informal affair, some students wearing outdoor, some indoor dress, and some gathered in on their way to bed. It was quite a usual thing to find groups of the 1955 Low Nook students talking to Miss Kitching, on the landing or in her room. They were always welcome, and always went away feeling that they had learned something or inspired with a fresh interest. On the second Saturday of the term, a party of students who had been at Low Nook last year went for a picnic on Latterbarrow. They found many interesting things, including a small baby squirrel; they wasted no time in running straight up to Miss Kitching's room to tell her all about it, their news was received with her usual quick interest and enthusiasm, and, of course, she showed them books in which they could look up things they had found!

Miss Kitching never ceased to take pleasure in the birds that came to her window. She would stand there watching the heron which visited Stock Beck. She was the first to point out a pair of waxwings on the drive. She stood in the garden watching a goldfinch feeding on a melancholy thistle head until quite a little crowd of students had collected to share her delight. One March she was called at her own request to listen to the migrants returning in the night, and she went into the students' room to make sure they had not missed the sounds. She was, of course, an authority on bird-lore and great was the triumph of anyone whose claim to have seen some rare bird was accepted by her.

Miss Kitching loved all wild flowers, and was delighted when 'bits and pieces' were brought to her from the lanes or fells. Yellow mountain poppies, blue jasione, flame-coloured bog asphodel fruits, Grass of Parnassus with its uncurling gold stamens, the soft green of opening beech leaves, the delicate pattern of hazel or alder twigs against a white wall—these were some of her favourites, to be welcomed year by year in their season.

Miss Kitching's last Christmas was full of joy. She had completed various tasks she had set herself, and was planning fresh activities, for it was always to the future that she pressed eagerly forward. She spent the morning in following the Christmas broadcasts of services and music which, as she said, had the Star of Bethlehem for their theme. She listened to the afternoon programme, *The Star We Follow*, with the keenest interest, and indeed she was planning a New Year message for her friends which should express the relationship between different ways of approach to knowledge. She did not regard Science and Religion as rivals, still less as enemies, but, in Charlotte Mason's tradition, allies in the apprehension of the one true Light. She rejoiced in the fact that world peace seemed unbroken on Christmas Day, and looked forward with confidence to the promise of a new age in spiritual as well as material progress. She found in Her Majesty the Queen's message to the British family of peoples a drawing together of many

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relationships and she entered with delight into the fun of Wilfred Pickles' Christmas Party.

The Archdeacon of Westmorland (The Venerable S. C. Bulley) gave Miss Kitching what proved to be her Last Communion on S. John's Day (December 27th). After her death he spoke of the talk he had had with her after the service that morning. The Archdeacon said:

'She was her usual self—her body tired perhaps, her spirit glowing, her mind alert. She entered with deep devotion into the service and after it spoke of the spiritual and mental refreshment which she had derived from the Christmas Day broadcast programmes. That last conversation I had with Miss Kitching was, like others, stimulating and forward looking. The Christmas Day sermons she had heard, the beauty of the carols and their values as a medium of religious truth, the hope that resides in a true concept of education and the danger that lurks in a false—that last conversation was what I would call a typical "Miss Kitching conversation"—penetrating, eager, hopeful, creative and yet humble all the time. Miss Kitching was one of the most widely read women—in theology as in much else—it has ever been my privilege to meet—the sort of person whom any parish priest would rejoice to number among his parishioners.'

Miss Kitching spent the next day in her usual health and spirits. She asked that a new member of the staff might be introduced to her, wrote some letters, prepared her desk for the next day's work, talked once more of what she called 'one of the happiest Christmases of my life', and spoke of Browning's picture of the beloved St. John in *A Death in the Desert*. Early in the morning of December 29th she slipped quietly into 'the Light of everlasting life'.

MAUD MARSDEN

Often I have talked with Miss Kitching about the time when, after Charlotte Mason's death, she was faced with carrying on the work. As always with her rememberings, the grave and the gay were mingled, and it is thus we shall remember our beloved 'Kitchie'.

Just now two thoughts which she has passed on are uppermost in our minds. First, the comforting knowledge that the living strength of the work done in the name of Charlotte Mason is greater than any one of us who carry it out and that it has so very many friends who help us to foster its growth. That leads on to the second thought—the tradition of hospitality, personal hospitality, which was so much a part of her way of life. We should like you all to know that this, too, we mean to carry on; so please come to Low Nook, to remember, to plan for the future, to talk about this and that or just to exchange greetings. You will be as welcome as ever and your coming will forge another link in the chain of tradition in the hands of those of us who now pause to look back and so gather strength to press forward.

E. L. MOLYNEUX

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WANSFELL AT SUNDOWN

Lines for E. K. written at Scale How.

I saw the long shadows lie across the hill
Carving its humps and hollows into strange relief,
While the late afternoon sun glowed pink
On the higher slopes, giving them a strange distant look
In the chill air which enfolds the summit there,
Chiselled to a keen edge against faint blue sky.
A brief measure of man's time in eternity
Goes by, and then—light fades from the hill
Leaving but its age-old contour, remote and dark
Against the sky. For a while it has held the light
Of the dying day, as in old age a face
Is aglow with serenity, reflecting the beauty
That made life complete, ready to pass
Through the night, to a fresh day beyond.

E.C.P.

NOTE:—*Wansfell rises to the east of Ambleside and can be seen from the Charlotte Mason College (Scale How) where Miss Kitching passed most of her life.*

* * *

The manuscript of this last message of Elsie Kitching was found on her desk. The notes were very rough, but from certain quotations often repeated it was possible to trace her intention. The whole would have been sent out in a more condensed form on a card, as at previous times, in fact the cards and envelopes had already been ordered. Many of the quotations are from PARENTS AND CHILDREN, at present out of print. Miss Kitching spent much time during the end of the year going through this volume with a reprint in view so that the thought it contains was much in her mind.

THREE SCORE YEARS AND TEN

From the first publication of Home Education in 1886 to the most recent edition, 1955. A sequence of thought for Christmas and the New Year, 1956, from the books of Charlotte Mason on the anniversary of her birthday, January 1st, 1842.

'AND THE GOVERNMENT SHALL BE UPON HIS SHOULDER'

Isaiah ix.v.6.

'The universe of mind as the universe of matter is governed by the unwritten laws of God'.—1886.

'It is not Moses or Darwin with me, I receive both, not by way of compromise, but in faith, believing that each, though in differing degree, speaks a revealed word . . . somehow, one is landed on the other side of the controversies of the day.'—1887.

'Give children such hold upon vital truths, and at the same time such an outlook upon current thought that they shall be landed on the safe side of the controversies of their day, open to truth in however new a light presented.'—1891.

"Education" is an inadequate word . . . "bringing up" is nearer the truth, perhaps because of its very vagueness; anyway "up" implies an aim, and "bringing" an effort . . . It is only as we recognise our limitations that our work becomes effective: when we see definitely what we are to do, what we can do, and what we cannot do, we set to work with confidence and courage; we have an end in view, and we make our way intelligently towards that end, and a way to an end, is method. It rests with parents not only to give their children birth into the life of intelligence, but to sustain the higher life they have borne. Now that life, which we call education, receives only one kind of sustenance, it grows upon ideas.'

'In this science of relations of things consists what we call wisdom.'
'Our whence is the Potency of the Child, our whither is the thought of the day.'

'Education is the science of relations.'—1898.

In 1864, C.M. Mason planned a 'middle school' for all classes of children up to the age of 16; in 1913 Miss Ambler's school at Drighlington began the P.U.S. work. C. M. Mason writes in 1921:

'I have to tell of an awakening of a 'general soul' at the touch of knowledge. Eight years ago the 'soul' of a class of children in a mining school awoke simultaneously to this magic touch and has remained awake.'

'We have to face two difficulties. We do not believe in children as intellectual persons nor in knowledge as requisite and necessary for intellectual life.'

At the end of these quotations Miss Kitching adds the following:

'1923, the Hon. Edward Lyttleton writes:

"Miss Mason has not only made a considerable contribution to the Philosophy of Education in connection with the laws of mind but she supplemented her theory with practice."

"I am convinced", once said Mr. Shandy, 'that there is a North West Passage to the intellectual world and that the sons of man have shorter ways of going to work.' There is a North West Passage of the mind and Charlotte Mason has found it."

'1954, Professor R. W. Livingstone:

"This country has produced many great teachers and a few important creators in the field of Education. Any list of the latter which did not include the name of Miss Charlotte Mason, the founder of the P.N.E.U., would be incomplete."

Miss Kitching's last letter was written on December 27th, 1955, and tells of her great joy in the Christmas Day broadcasts. It ends:

"What gratitude we owe to all the patient thinkers and workers who never give in and especially the great leaders.
With love and many hopes for the future."

ELSIE

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